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Harran: Last Refuge of Classical Paganism
by Donald H. Frew

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For many years, I have been researching and writing a book on the subject of the origins of the modern Witchcraft movement. I now believe that a direct line of transmission can be traced from the Hermetic and Neoplatonic theurgy of late antiquity to the beginnings of the modern Craft movement in the 1930s. Of course, any such transmission must be embedded within the wider context of the transmission of Hermeticism in general from the Classical world to the European Renaissance and the beginnings of the Enlightenment.

Anyone looking into this history cannot help but be struck by a glaring gap. At the end of the Pagan world in the latter days of the Roman Empire, so the sources tell us, several Hermetic and Neoplatonic scholars left the Empire to go "to the East". At the beginning of the revival and rediscovery of Classical knowledge in Europe, Classical texts in Arabic translations, including the Hermetica (the revealed teachings of Hermes Trismegistus), came back to Europe "from the East". What happened during the 500 or so years in-between? And where "in the East" did classical Greco-Roman knowledge (and possibly classical Greco-Roman Paganism) survive?

One name comes up over and over again: Harran. Even so, there is relatively little information about this ancient city in Western sources. As more and more of my sources pointed to Harran, and in the face of an almost total lack of available information about the city and its people, I resolved to go and see for myself, talk to the local authorities and scholars, and find what I could. Anna Korn and I visited the area in January of 1998. This article incorporates many of our findings.

Harran before the Neoplatonists

The city of Harran was founded c. 2000 bce as a merchant outpost of Ur, situated on the major trade route across northern Mesopotamia (Green 1992: 19). The name comes from the Sumerian and Akkadian "Harran-U", meaning "journey", "caravan", or "crossroad" (Kurkcuoglu 1996: 11). For centuries it was a prominent Assyrian city, known for its Temple of Sin, the Moon God (Green 1992: 23). While many modern Pagans may balk at the idea of a Moon God, the people of upper Mesopotamia lived in a different world than do we. Harran is in the middle of a flat, dry plain that was described as a "barren wasteland" even in antiquity, nourished only by its many wells (another possible meaning of "Harran-U" is "broiling heat"). In this baking, desolate landscape, the Sun was an enemy and the Night a comforter. The Moon, the ruler of the Night, must therefore be the supreme deity and therefore, to a patriarchal culture, male. Sin was the giver of fertility and of oracles. In this latter capacity, he also served as kingmaker. Many rulers sought his blessings and confirmation of their reign, endowing the city of Harran and its temples with riches in the process.

As early as the middle of the 2nd millennium bce, the Harranians established a pilgrimage site at the Giza Plateau in Egypt (Hassan 1946: 34). In later centuries, they would say that the Pyramids were the tombs of their gods, Idris (Hermes) and Seth (Agathodaimon) (Green 1992: 110, 174, 212). In the 6th century bce, after the fall of Nabonidus, Harran was ruled by the Persians until the coming of Alexander the Great. In the 4th century bce, Alexander conquered the area. After him, Harran was part of the Hellenistic Seleucid Kingdom until the 2nd century bce, when the Parthians conquered the Seleucids. In the 1st century bce, the Romans arrived. During this time, Harran passed through many hands, usually at least nominally under foreign authority, but in practice independent. It was during this period that a Roman army led by Crassus was defeated by the Parthians near Harran (called Carrhae by the Romans) in May 53 bce. It was one of the worst military defeats in Roman history; one the Romans would never forget (Stark 1966: 114-23).

In the 4th century, 363 ce, the last Pagan Emperor Julian stopped at Harran at the beginning of his Persian campaign. He consulted the oracles at the Temple of the Moon (called either "Selene" or "Luna" by Roman historians, reflecting Roman ideas of the Moon's gender). The oracles warned of disaster. Julian ignored the warnings and was killed during the campaign; some say by a Christian in his own ranks (Smith 1976: 114). His body was brought back by way of Harran, and Harran was the only city in the Empire to declare citywide mourning after his death.

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This complex history of Harran is important in order to understand the city's eventual fate. For much of its history, Harran welcomed any would-be conqueror that came along, switching allegiances at the drop of a hat, and so peacefully going on about its own business.

The Coming of the Neoplatonists

By the 6th century, Paganism in the Roman Empire was fighting a losing battle for survival. Pagans had been forbidden to teach, and finally, to sacrifice. Temples were being closed, if not destroyed, all over the Empire. In 529 ce, the Emperor ordered the closing of Academy at Athens, the last true bastion of Pagan learning in the Empire. In response, many Neoplatonists, invited by a Persian monarch who knew the value of philosophers, fled "to the East", specifically, to Harran (Chuvin 1990: 137). There, they founded a Neoplatonic academy that survived at Harran up into the 12th century (Chuvin 1990: 139, 149).

Neoplatonism began as a school of philosophic / spiritual thought in the 3rd century ce with the works of the Roman philosopher Plotinus (b. 205 ce). Educated in Alexandria, he traveled to Persia and eventually settled in Rome to teach. Beginning with the Middle Platonic concept of the Divine Creator of the universe, or Demiurge, Plotinus introduced three radical concepts. First, he postulated the existence of a divine, ineffable unity more fundamental than the Demiurge. This he called "the One", although it was also sometimes called "the Good", "the True", and "the Beautiful" (akin to the "Dryghton" of some contemporary Craft traditions).

Second, Plotinus argued that all Being emanates from the One through a hierarchy of realities consisting of: the One → Mind (the Gods & the Demiurge) → Soul (the Daimons) → Matter, and at the same time returns to the One. The Natural World, as we experience it, is the interaction of the organizing properties of Soul with the chaotic properties of Matter.

Third, Plotinus explained that while this hierarchy is ontologically true, emanation (prohodos) and return (epistrophe) are neither temporal nor spatial. In other words, all things are always both emanating from and returning to the One and exist simultaneously at all levels of the hierarchy. (An excellent, simple introduction to the concepts of Neoplatonism can be found in David Fideler's *Introduction to Porphyry's Letter to His Wife Marcella*, Zimmern 1986: 7-35. For a more in depth presentation, I recommend R.T. Wallis' *Neoplatonism*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1972). Plotinus focused on a contemplative, ascetic approach to union with the One, as did his student Porphyry (b. 233 ce), who is responsible for organizing Plotinus' teachings into the text known as *The Enneads*. However, Porphyry's student, Iamblichus of Chalcis (b. 250 ce), favored an approach to the One that was known as "theurgy" or "god-making". If the One is immanent in all of the Natural World, reasoned Iamblichus, then not only is the Natural World inherently good, but all things in the Natural World are paths to the One. Iamblichus also introduced a concept now called "the law of mean terms". This stated that for there to be any communication between any two things or concepts there had to be a third thing in between that partakes of both. Since this idea can be applied ad infinitum, it meant that there could be no gaps between the levels of reality. The spiritual universe of the Neoplatonists, therefore, became fluid and continuous, without defined boundaries between its many constituent parts and levels.

Neoplatonic theurgy used techniques that we would recognize as "natural magick" in rituals designed to facilitate union with the One. Its source material consisted of the writings of Plotinus, Porphyry, and Iamblichus (as well as earlier Platonists), the Egyptian writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus (the *Hermetica*), the texts collected as the Greek Magical Papyri (PGM), and collected teachings (the *Chaldean Oracles*) "channeled" from Hekate and other deities by two 2nd century Roman theurgists (the *Julianii*). With these texts as guides, Neoplatonic theurgy focused on two forms of "god-making": deity possession and the creation of animated statues. The former was very similar, if not identical, to the practice modern Witches know as "Drawing Down the Moon", and indeed this phrase was used in antiquity to describe this practice. The latter involved techniques that we have all but lost, but vestiges of which remain in the certain contemporary Craft traditions.

Neopythagoreanism was a 1st century ce revival of the number mysticism of Pythagoras.

Incorporating elements of astrology and Eastern magical lore, it was very popular with Iamblichus and was eventually subsumed into Neoplatonism.

Proclus of Athens (b. 412 ce) was the last major Neoplatonic writer before the closing of the School at Athens and the flight of the surviving Neoplatonic theurgists to safety in the Persian Empire.

In addition to its emphasis on philosophy and theurgy, the later Neoplatonists also stressed the importance of traditional Pagan popular religion (Athanasias 1993: 7-8; Shaw 1995: 148-152). The continued performance of time-honored rites formed a necessary foundation to the more intellectual pursuits of Neoplatonic philosophy. The Neoplatonists sought to incorporate and synthesize the practices of all Pagans known to them, believing that all were divinely inspired. In this, they were in

tune with the syncretic nature of their age, in which composite, cross-cultural deities such as Serapis and Jupiter-Ammon came to predominate. Accordingly, most Neoplatonists not only continued to practice traditional popular Paganism, but were also initiates of Mithras, Isis, and others. The 4th century Neoplatonist, Macrobius (writing in *Saturnalia*), reconciled the mythologies of the many Pagan traditions by asserting that all Gods were actually aspects of a single Sun God, and all Goddesses aspects of a single Moon Goddess, and that really there was just the God and the Goddess--and beyond them, the One, of course (discussed in Godwin 1993: 142-143).

When Julian attempted his revival of traditional Paganism in the 4th century, he asked his friend Sallustius to write a sort of "catechism" of Paganism from a Neoplatonic point of view. This text, *On the Gods and the World*, survives (best version is Nock 1926). It is not insignificant, I think, that Gerald Gardner refers to this text in *The Meaning of Witchcraft* (Aquarian Press, 1959):

"Now, the thing that will, I think, strike most the consciousness of the reader who is well versed in the teaching of the higher types of spiritualist and occult circles generally is not the antiquity of this teaching of Sallustius, but its startling modernity. It might have been spoken yesterday. Further, it might have been spoken at a witch meeting, at any time, as a general statement of their creed ... the spirit of his [Sallustius'] teaching, the spirit of the Mysteries of his day, which is also the spirit of the beliefs of the witch cult, is timeless" (Gardner 1959: 188-189).

(In other words, Gardner specifically states that this Neoplatonic text from the ancient world may be understood as explaining the theology of the Craft as he understood it. This statement alone should engender interest in Neoplatonism on the part of contemporary Witches.)

Harran under Islam

In 717 ce, the Muslim caliph Umar II founded the first Muslim university in the world at Harran. To give this university a good start, Umar brought many of the last remaining Hermeticists from Alexandria and installed them at Harran. A later Harranian author, Ibn Wahshiya, would write about these Hermeticists in the mid-9th century ce:

"The Hermesians let nobody into the secrets of their knowledge but their disciples, lest the arts and sciences should be debased by being common amongst the vulgar. They hid therefore their secrets and treasures from them by the means of this alphabet, and by inscriptions, which could be read by nobody except the sons of wisdom and learning.

"These initiated scholars were divided into four classes. The first Class comprehended the sect Hara'misah Alhawmiyah, who were all descendants of Hermes the Great. ... No man in the world was acquainted with any of their secrets: they alone possessed them.

"They were the authors of the books commonly called the books of Edris (Enoch) [Hermes]. They constructed temples dedicated to spirits, and buildings of magical wisdom. The few of those, who in our time are acquainted with this knowledge, live retired in some islands near the frontiers of China, and continue to tread the steps of their forefathers. [Hammer-Purgstall notes that this might refer to the Brahmins.]

"The second class of the Hermesians, called Hara'misah Alpina'walu'ziyah, the sons of the brother of Hermes, whose name was Asclibianos. ... They never communicated their secrets, and Hermetic treasures to any body, but they preserved them from generation to generation, till our days. ...

"The third class was called Ashra'kiyu'n (Eastern) or children of the sister of Hermes, who is known amongst the Greek by the name of Trismegistos Thoosdios. This class was intermixed with some strangers and profane, who found means to get hold of the expressions of their hearts. Their sciences and knowledge are come down to us.

"The fourth class, denominated Masha'wun (walkers, or peripatetic philosophers), was formed by the strangers, who found means to mingle with the children and family of Hermes. They were the first who introduced the worship of the stars and constellations, and who forsook the worship of the God of Gods. (Be his glory exalted--there is no other God but him!) From hence came their divisions, and everything that has been handed down to us, proceeds originally from these two sects, the Ashra'kiyu'n, eastern, and Masha'wun, peripatetic philosophers" (Hammer-Purgstall 1806: pp 23-30).

Later in the 8th century, Harun al-Rashid (the caliph of the Arabian Nights) founded the Bayt al-Hikmah ("House of Wisdom") at Baghdad to be a center for the translation of Greek and Latin texts into Arabic. Scholars from Harran would later be brought there.

In the 9th century, 830 ce, the caliph Abdallah al-Mamun (son of al-Rashid) arrived at Harran at the head of a conquering army and what happened next has dominated both scholarship on Harran and the potential for archaeological excavation ever since.

The "Con-job story" and the "Sabians" of Harran

Al-Mamun was outside the gates of the Harran, intent upon razing the city. He demanded to know if the inhabitants were Muslims. No, they said. Were they Christians or Jews? No. Well, al-Mamun said, if they were not ahl al-kitab ("People of the Book"), they were not protected from violence by the Qur'an and he would sack their city. What happened next depends on whom (or more properly, what) you believe (Green 1992: 4 -6, 100-123; Gunduz 1994: 15-52).

Some accounts say that the Harranians replied, "We are Sabians!"

One account, that of the writer Abu Yusuf Isha' al-Qati'y'i, a Christian historian of the time who tended to make both Pagans and Muslims look bad, says that al-Mamun gave the Harranians a week to come up with an answer. The Harranians then consulted a lawyer knowledgeable in Muslim law who told them, "Tell him you're Sabians. No one knows what they are, but they're protected!" Either way, the Harranians claimed to be Sabians, produced a copy of the Hermetica as their "Book" and claimed Hermes (recognized by Muslims of the time as one of the prophets leading up to Muhammed) as their prophet.

The question hinged (and still hinges) around three verses in the Qur'an (Ali 1405 AH: 26-27, 308-309, 953-954):

*Qur'an 2:62

Those who believe (in the Qur'an).
And those who follow the Jewish (scriptures),
And the Christians and the Sabians,
Any who believe in Allah
And the Last Day,
And work righteousness
, Shall have their reward
With their Lord on them
Shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.

*Qur'an 5:69

Those who believe (in the Qur'an).
Those who follow the Jewish (scriptures),
And the Sabians and the Christians
Any who believe in Allah
And the Last Day,
And work righteousness,
On them shall be no fear,
Nor shall they grieve.

*Qur'an 22:17

Those who believe (in the Qur'an),
Those who follow the Jewish (scriptures),
And the Sabians, Christians,
Magians, and Polytheists,
Allah will judge between them
On the Day of Judgment:
For Allah is witness
Of all things.

At this point, history becomes a matter of doctrine, with one's preference being determined by one's interpretation of and beliefs about the Qur'an. Whether or not the Harranians were indeed Sabians, according to modern scholarship, depends in large part on whether the scholar is a Muslim or not. In the days of al-Mamun, the dominant interpretation of Islam was known as Mu'tazilism (Green 1992: 130-135). Mu'tazilism relied upon an approach called kalam ("rationalist theology") and argued that revelation was an ongoing process in which scripture guided and informed direct mystical experience of the divine, to which one then applied reason in the analysis and understanding. Mu'tazilism was the view of the Abbasid caliphs (including both al-Rashid and al-Mamun) and led to a valuing of the philosophical writings of the Greeks and Romans. Most of the writings available to them were those of the Neoplatonists and the Hermeticists. The logical and philosophical arguments of the Neoplatonists in support of theurgy could be used to support the Mu'tazilite reliance on kalam. After the Abbasids, Mu'tazilism was replaced in a period of religious upheaval by a new dominant interpretation of Islam, Ash'arism. Ash'arism was and is much more devotional in approach, focused primarily on the Qur'an and Hadith (recorded sayings of the Prophet). It is much more conservative than Mu'tazilism, downplays mysticism (although there is a certain grudging acceptance of Sufism), and definitely wants nothing to do with Paganism. (Interestingly enough, under Ash'arism the followers of Shi'ite Islam, which also believe in a form of continuing revelation, would rely on the arguments of the Harranians for

support, protecting them where possible from oppression. The idea of Shi'ite Muslims protecting Pagans from oppression will no doubt surprise many modern Pagans.)

The Ash'arites would much rather believe the "con-job story" than think that the Prophet in any way endorsed any kind of Paganism. Ash'arism remains the dominant interpretation of Islam to this day. Accordingly, books by modern Muslim scholars (e.g. Gunduz) tend to endorse the "con-job story", while books by modern non-Muslim scholars (e.g. Green) tend to point out the problems with it:

1) The primary source for the "con-job story", Abu Yusuf, had a vested interest in making both the Harranians and the Muslims look bad, the former as con-men and the latter as their dupes.

2) The Harranians had been paying the poll tax to the caliphate for many years. Only People of the Book could do so.

3) Harran was an extremely well known center of learning at the time. There is no way that al-Mamun or his administrators could not have known about their religion.

4) The Harranians are called Sabians in Muslim documents at least 75 years before al-Mamun's visit. The only reasonable conclusion is that the Harranians were indeed Sabians. If so, what did the Prophet mean when he included them in the protected people? Mecca at the time of Muhammed was steeped in traditions of the earlier prophet Abraham. Abraham came to Mecca from Harran (the Well of Abraham, mentioned in the Old Testament, is outside the city). It is entirely possible that Muhammed was aware of the religion of the Harranians and distinguished its philosophical / theurgical approach from the "idolatry" of the Pagans around Mecca.

At any rate, the continuing controversy around the identification of Harranians as Sabians means that in modern discourse one must always refer to "Harranian Sabians" to distinguish them from the many other attempts to identify the Sabians as another group.

However, from the time of al-Mamun, in common usage "Sabian" became virtually synonymous with "Harranian". And as the writings of Arabic scholars about the planetary religion of the Harranian Sabians became more widespread, "Sabian" became synonymous with "astrologer" and sometimes "sorcerer", as had the word "Chaldean" among the Romans.

(An etymological aside ... The very early connection between Harran and Egypt mentioned above, while noted by Egyptologists, has been largely ignored by those studying Harran. As a result, a possible source for the name "Sabian" has also been ignored. Most have focused either on the Arabic verb saba'a, "to convert", the Hebrew word saba, meaning "troops", the Ethiopic word sbh, meaning "dispensing alms", or the Syriac verb sb', "to baptize". I lean towards the Egyptian root sba, meaning "star", "star-god", and "teacher". As both followers of what has been called "astral" religion and renowned teachers and scholars, this would seem to be appropriate and fitting.)

The Survival of Paganism at Harran

Late in the 9th century, the Harranian Pythagorean Thabit ibn Qurra was invited to found a Sabian school at the Bayt al-Hikmah in Baghdad. Thabit was adamantly Pagan, but maintained his position as an advisor to the caliph, even when making statements like:

"We are the heirs and propagators of Paganism. ... Happy is he who, for the sake of Paganism, bears the burden [of persecution] with firm hope. Who else have civilized the world, and built the cities, if not the nobles and kings of Paganism? Who else have set in order the harbours and the rivers? And who else have taught the hidden wisdom? To whom else has the Deity revealed itself, given oracles, and told about the future, if not to the famous men among the Pagans? The Pagans have made known all this. They have discovered the art of healing the soul; they have also made known the art of healing the body. They have filled the earth with settled forms of government, and with wisdom, which is the highest good. Without Paganism the world would be empty and miserable" (quoted in Scott, 1982, 105).

Note: Thabit used the Syriac word hanputho, usually translated as "pagan", but also possibly meaning "a possessor of the true religion" (Green 1992: 114).

In the 10th century, the amir 'Adud al-Dawlah issued an "edict of toleration" specifically permitting traditional rites of Harranian Pagans.

In the 11th century, after the Muslim conquest of North Africa and Spain, the Ghayat al-Hakim ("Aim of the Sage"), a book known in Latin as the Picatrix, was written in Spain by "al Majriti" (Pingree 1980; 1986). Considered the basis of the grimoire tradition of Europe (including material that survives down into the Books of Shadows of certain modern Craft traditions), the Picatrix includes significant material about the religion and rites of the Harranians. This same "al Majriti" is also our source for the Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa ("Epistles of the Brethren of Purity"), a mystical Muslim order incorporating teachings from Neoplatonic, Hermetic, and even Buddhist sources (Netton 1991). Both books contain material from each other and have a Harranian source (Nasr 1993: 25-104). Whether "al Majriti" was himself a Harranian Sabian is unknown. Note: David Pingree has pointed out that many of the Greco-Roman

magical texts evident in the Picatrix passed into Arabic by way of Sanskrit, picking up Indian magical terms and Sanskrit names for the Gods along the way (Pingree 1980). Truly, Harran deserved the name "crossroad".

The Last Days of Harran and the Return of Paganism to Europe

Later in the 11th century, 1081 ce, the Temple of Moon God was finally destroyed by al-Shattir, an ally of Seljuk Turks, contemporaneous with the rise of Ash'arism (Green 1992: 98-100). At this point, the "con-job" story became the "official" Muslim view. Also late in the 11th century, c. 1050 ce, the Christian writer Michael Psellus, studying in Constantinople, received an annotated copy of the *Hermetica* from a scholar from Harran. It is quite possible that these were sacred texts that had escaped the decline and ultimate destruction of the temples (Scott 1982: 25-27, 108-109; Copenhaver 1992: xi; Faivre 1995: 182). Copies of the *Hermetica* eventually made their way to Western Europe, igniting the interest of Cosimo de'Medici who, in 1462, set a young Marsilio Ficino to the task of translation. Thus began Europe's fascination with the *Hermetica* (Copenhaver 1992: xvii-l; Faivre 1995: 30, 38-40, 98).

During the First Crusade, Harran was often contrasted with its neighbor to the north, Edessa (known today as Urfa). Edessa was the birthplace of the prophet Abraham and the first city to convert to Christianity (Segal 1970: 60-81). Edessa converted after its king, Abgar, wrote to Jesus requesting healing. The apostle Thaddeus came with a cloth bearing the image of Jesus' face. Abgar was healed and his kingdom converted. The cloth, known as the Mandylion, was an important relic during the Crusades (Segal 1970: 215; Wilson 1998: 161-175). (Recently discovered documents have led some to believe that it is the same cloth that later came to be called the Shroud of Turin.)

In the 12th century, Edessa was the capital of the short-lived Crusader County of Edessa. The Knights Templar occupied the city and are described as "roaming about the countryside at will". Their presence might explain an unusual architectural feature that survives at Harran. In the Citadel, there is a Christian chapel of Crusader architecture (Lloyd & Brice 1951: 102-103).

There is no record of any Crusaders ever conquering the city (Segal 1970: 230-251; Green 1992: 98; Gunduz 1994: 133). The presence of the chapel would appear to indicate a peaceful Crusader presence. The fact that the chapel is side-by-side with the Citadel's mosque, even sharing an entry hall, is even more striking. It was far more common for chapels and mosques of that time to be built on top of each other or to be co-opted one from the other. Is this another example of the city's remarkable religious tolerance?

This chapel also contains a feature, a floor of black basalt brought from hundreds of miles to the East, which is found in only one other place at Harran. The floor of the temple of the Moon God (currently under the remains of the Grand Mosque) is of the same black basalt construction. Muslim accounts have always referred both to a temple of the Moon God under the Grand Mosque and to one in the Citadel (Lloyd & Brice 1951: 96; Gunduz 1994: 204; Kurkcuglu 1996: 17). The black basalt floor under the Crusader chapel suggests these Crusaders, whoever they were, built their chapel on top of the Citadel's Moon God temple.

Edessa delighted in contrasting itself, the first Christian city, with Harran, the last Pagan holdout. Unfortunately, Edessa is higher up the water table from Harran. As Christian Edessa grew and prospered it sank more and more wells, gradually drying up the wells of Harran.

Finally, in 1271 ce, the Mongols conquered the area around Harran. They decided that Harran was too much trouble to control (they would probably open their gates to the next army to come along), too remote to garrison, but too valuable to destroy. They arrived at an unusual and dramatic solution. They deported the populace of the city, walled up the city gates, and left it. There is no record of the city being destroyed, sacked, burned, or in any other way damaged. The space enclosed by the city walls gradually filled up with wind-blown dirt.

Since that time, only three parts of Harran have been kept relatively clear of covering soil. The Citadel at the south end of the city and the central tumulus in the center are on hills and so remained above the accumulated debris. The area of the university (and its Grand Mosque) have been kept clear by human effort because of its historical and religious significance to Muslims. Everything else is about thirty feet below the current ground level. It is difficult to over-estimate the treasure-trove of artifacts and knowledge waiting to be uncovered. One has to wonder why it hasn't been excavated.

A Treasure Waiting to be Uncovered ... or Destroyed

The most recent archaeological information on Harran can be found in three articles published in issues of *Anatolian Studies* by Seton Lloyd and William Brice in 1951 and by D.S. Rice in 1952. These expeditions confined themselves to surveying the site and clearing the rubble from in front of one of the city gates.

H.J.W. Drijvers, author of *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*, visited Harran sometime in the 1970s, and Tamara Green, author of *The City of the Moon God*, visited Harran in 1977, but both confined themselves to observing the discoveries previously reported and did not uncover any new material. Nurettin Yardimci has headed a small but meaningful effort at Harran, doing restoration work on buildings that were falling down and working with a Belgian team to excavate the Roman-period dwellings on the central tumulus, but this effort had to be suspended in the mid-90's after only a couple of seasons due to Kurdish violence (Bucak 1998: pers. comm.). The results of the tumulus dig have not yet been published.

Harran remains virtually untouched. Why? The reasons appear to be financial, social, and religious. When Anna and I met with Eyyup Bucak, the Director of the Museum in Urfa, he was obviously haggard and over-worked. He explained that the Turkish government is engaged in what is called the GAP project, a dam across the Euphrates that will provide water for irrigating the Harran Plain. The rising waters behind the dam will eventually cover six important Neolithic sites. Accordingly, rescue archaeology is underway at a furious pace. This has taken all of their funding and energies for many years. While Dir. Bucak said that he would welcome foreign interest in Harran, the Turkish government's regulations make it very difficult for foreign archaeologists to work in Turkey. Turkey has a long history of their archaeological treasures being plundered by foreigners.

The GAP project is bringing irrigation to the Harran Plain. Irrigation means crops; crops means farmers; farmers mean settlement. When Lloyd, Brice, and Rice visited Harran in the 50s, only a few of the "distinctive beehive huts" of the local nomads could be found in the filled-in area inside the old city walls. Now, permanent houses are being built there. Turkey does not exercise "eminent domain" over archaeological sites. Whatever is under a house is lost forever.

Anna and I also met with two professors of Muslim theology from the local University of Harran at Urfa, Dr. Mustafa Ekinici and Prof. Kamil Harman. Dr. Ekinici is a specialist in esoteric movements in Islam. We explained what we were studying. They not only knew nothing about the early Muslim and pre-Muslim movements we were studying, but actively disapproved of our studying them. The Ash'arite view of the Harranians prevails and contributes to a lack of interest in excavating Harran. (And when the topic drifted into them inquiring about our own religious beliefs ... the evening got interesting and we sorely taxed the abilities of our able translator.)

Harran was a thriving Mesopotamian and later Hellenistic city of some 10 to 20,000 people for nearly 3000 years. Towards the end, for about 500 years, Harran would appear to have been a kind of intellectual refugee camp for educated members of the mystery cults of late antiquity, eventually becoming the font from which Hermetic and Neoplatonic learning returned to Europe. Many of the Pagans of Harran had fled the triumph of Christianity in the West. All of them, including the practitioners of the indigenous Moon cult, were surrounded by an ever-expanding Islam. The Pagan community of Harran must have lived with a constant awareness of being the last refuge of the old Pagan religions. These "Pagan refugees" would have had every reason to preserve their traditions for future generations. Some were Mithraists, well aware of the concept of turning cycles of ages. Others would have known that their own sacred texts, the *Hermetica*, predicted the fall of Paganism, and its eventual return:

"Hermes Trismegistus speaking to his student Asclepius:

"[24] ... since it befits the wise to know all things in advance, of this you must not remain ignorant: a time will come when it will appear that the Egyptians paid respect to the Divine with faithful mind and painstaking reverence--to no purpose. All their holy worship will ... perish without effect, for the Divine shall return from earth to the Heavens, and Egypt will be abandoned. ... When foreigners occupy the land and territory, not only will reverence fall into neglect but, even harder, a prohibition under penalty prescribed by law (so-called) will be enacted against reverence, fidelity, and divine worship. Then this most holy land, seat of shrines and temples, will be filled completely with tombs and corpses.

"[25] ... In their weariness the people of that time will find the world nothing to wonder at or to worship. This world--a good thing that never had nor has nor will have its better--will be endangered. People will find it oppressive and scorn it. They will not cherish this entire world, a work of the Gods beyond compare, a glorious construction, a bounty composed of images of multiform variety, ... a unity of everything that can be honored, praised, and finally loved by those who see it, a multiform accumulation taken as a single thing.

"How mournful when the gods withdraw from mankind! Only the baleful angels remain to mingle with humans ...

"[26] ... When all this comes to pass, Asclepius, then ... the Gods ... will restore the world to its beauty of old so that the world itself will again seem deserving of worship and wonder, and with constant benedictions and proclamations of praise the people of that time will honour the Gods... And this will be the geniture of the world: a reformation of all good things and a restitution, most holy and most

reverent, of nature itself, reordered after the passage of time... which is and was everlasting and without beginning" (adapted from Copenhagen 1992: 81ff.).

Ibn Shaddad, who wrote a financial inspection report on Harran in 1242 ce, only twenty-nine years before its demise, described cisterns feeding public fountains, four madrasas (theological colleges), two hospices, a hospital, two mosques (in addition to the Grand Mosque), and seven public baths. To these, Ibn Jubair, who visited the city in 1184 ce described "the city's flourishing bazaars, roofed with wood so that the people there are constantly in the shade. You cross these suqs as if you were walking through a huge house. The roads are wide and at every cross-road there is a dome of gypsum." (Rice 1952: 36-39)

Harran was the last haven of Mediterranean Paganism up until the 11th century--only 800 years ago. It was never destroyed, it was never sacked, and it was never dug up by treasure hunters. It was just abandoned and allowed to fill in with dirt. And it has never been excavated. It is not difficult to imagine that under some 30 feet of wind-blown sand and dirt, the heritage of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern Paganism is just waiting, intact, for someone to dig it up. But they'll have to hurry ...

Another effect of the GAP project, and its attendant increased irrigation, is that the water table of the Harran Plain is once again rising. Whatever treasures are waiting underground, whatever documents survive (and the Museum believes there are likely to be many), will soon be below the water table. I hope that an increased awareness of Harran's place as a repository of our Pagan heritage will lead to the necessary conservation and study of these sites that are so important to the history of Western Paganism. I fully expect the final unveiling of Harran to rival Pompeii in the splendor and value of its contents.

Recommended Books & Articles on Harran & Harranian Religion:

(Note: I am indebted to Brandy Williams for first making many of these texts available to me and for sharing the fruits of her own extensive research on the subject.)

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